

Mutiny in Banja Luka, Bosnia - ICG

As our text on the war in Yugoslavia and the struggles taken up by the proletariat against the permanent degradation of their conditions of life went to press mutinies broke out in certain sectors of the Serbian army, confirming that even in the worst situation of counter-revolution our class continues to be the only viable alternative to the horrors of capitalism.

From Communism #9, September 1993

The information which we have obtained from that war zone is very fragmentary but we can nevertheless give a glimpse of the strength of the proletariat, at any rate the subversive character which it contains and the social contradiction which it carries and which undermines all institutions, including those made up of the "reliable" and "loyal" troops of the bourgeoisie.

In the Serb bastion of Banja Luka (North Western Bosnia) three elite units, the First Army Corp of Krajina, the 16th Motorised Unit and the First Armoured Brigade, launched a mutiny on their return to the front on 10 September. The "Serbian" - in such a moment of confrontation nationality is dissolved! - mutineers entered the town with their armoured cars and took control of the main official buildings, notably the local radio and TV stations, the town hall and the Head Quarters of the army! The rebels immediately gave themselves a leadership, an "emergency general staff", baptised "September 93", led by non-commissioned officers and subalterns. At its head could be found a corporal!

Their demands were: an increase in their "miserable pay" (the equivalent of 1 Dollar per month for the ordinary soldiers), the arrest of "war profiteers, who instead of being on watch in the trenches are getting rich with the blessing of those in power, leading an easy life at the rear, sometimes in fashionable circles". A "black list" of 700 of these "profiteers" was drawn up and arrests began. That same evening the mayor of the town had the honour of opening the dank dungeons. For a month before the soldiers, nothing more than proletarians regimented in the uniform of the fatherland, had denounced their conditions of non-existence and threatened repeatedly to "turn their rifles on those in the rear!", in their own words. With each period of leave they feared returning to find their families reduced to desperation. A desperation which even their own death could not erase. The payment lavished on their families by the state wasn't even enough to cover the costs of burial!

This movement revealed the profound social fractures which developed as the war dragged on. Here, it is clear that the union sacrée was BLOWN APART. All the "appeals for calm and reason" were in vain. From that moment the bourgeoisie imposed a prudent silence which said much about their fears of stoking the fires of class struggle. The bourgeois had to recognise "their obsession with seeing the awakening of Serb-Serb conflicts the like of which had never been seen throughout history". Behind this journalistic verbiage in *Le Monde* the bourgeoisie tried to hide the spectre which haunts them, their terror at seeing proletarians taking up their real arms, class against class, against this nightmare.

In fact the mutineers took the town into their hands with the support of other proletarians. They were the formal and focused expression of a profound movement of discontent. In the town the situation was "calm", no more shots rang out in the night. That is to say that the state did not dare or no longer had the means to send "reliable" troops to put down the rebellion. The "Rambos" on duty who always appeared on the front pages of the newspapers disappeared from the boulevards, swept away by the mutiny. For the first time in several months Banja Luka had an uninterrupted electricity supply. The insurgents seized the power

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stations and began to provide for the region which they controlled. Against all the sacrifices imposed by the bourgeois and their war economy the proletarian defeatists of Banja Luka IMPOSED IN THEIR ACTS AND BY FORCE the immediate satisfaction of our basic needs!

Very quickly, on the announcement of the mutiny in Banja Luka, numerous proletarians in various brigades of the Bosnian Serb army sent telegrams of solidarity. Thanks to this support the mutineers declared that they wanted to take control of ALL these units. Alas, it is not with fine phrases that you generalise a movement: declarations and telegrams of solidarity are not enough. Behind the words are the acts which matter. If the proletariat wants to definitively rid itself of the butchery which has massacred it for more than two years in the region the one and only solution is the GENERALISATION in acts of revolutionary defeatism. We must finish with "Serbs", "Croats", "Muslims" and other

categories with which Capital tries to crush us. The development of struggle has its own requirements: it must break social cohesion not only in the units of the army but in the whole of society. For this it needs to finish once and for all with nationalism in affirming loud and clear that proletarians have no interest in this war, nor in this dying world. We call for ONLY ONE WAR, that which is against our exploiters, whether they are Serbs, Croats, Muslims or whatever. Against them there should be no mercy. To show any would be a sign of weakness.

Improving our conditions of life -and even GOING BEYOND them- can only be imposed by a generalisation of the balance of forces that the mutineers of Banja Luka were only able to establish in too local a fashion. In fact generalisation means directly attacking and destroying everything which represents the State. Proletarians from various units solidarising with the mutineers contented themselves with declarations of intent when the situation DEMANDED

something else: not only PASSING openly into the camp of insurrection but also ACCELERATING this by a radicalisation of demands and globalising them to put an end to the butchery. The situation called for the arrest of their own officers, for the use of their arms to attack the State etc...

Words have never made any difference to our misery!!!

The situation now is characterised by a state of general weakness of our class across all the struggles going on in the world. There is a lack of continuity, of liaison and of extension.

Wherever struggles break out, some strikes, some riots in separate places, and Capital manages to maintain this separation, there, as it happens, is where the community of misery and struggle can be found! While at Banja Luka the mutineers showed that they had lost when they began to accept the view that their demands could only be realised by the state, in Lithuania other soldiers mutinied. By this type of action proletarians bring more and more to the fore our only response as a class faced by wars of extermination: revolutionary defeatism, the refusal to march along with the plans of nationalism, to be sacrificed for "their" new country! Wherever the bourgeoisie is able to dragoon citizenised and atomised proletarians into this mass called "the people" our class sooner or later raises its head! Elsewhere, the Banja Luka mutiny might well have been "the first movement of soldiers' rebellion among the Bosnian Serbs since the start of the war" (as the whole of the media like to proclaim it) but it was not the first

manifestation of proletarian defeatism against this conflict (see the numerous examples in our main text (1).

Despite the weaknesses seen the contagion of the Banja Luka mutiny nevertheless gains ground. On 14 September the newspapers announced that not only had the mutineers hardened their movement but that defeatism had extended to other units such as the garrison town of Sokolac near Sarajevo.

Riven with contradictions, the mutiny now balances between its strengths and its weaknesses.

The proletarians fall into the trap set by the professionals of interminable discussion. More and more the mutiny is emptied of its subversive content and reenters the hellish cycle of negotiations, proposals, counter-proposals, accords and other rubbish of the same type which changes ABSOLUTELY NOTHING concerning their intolerable conditions of misery. Little by little the insurgents came to find a place in the grand permanent spectacle of bourgeois politics. After some immediate demands aimed at improving their lot, the proletarians came to be poisoned by politicism and blamed their misfortunes on one faction of the State as opposed to another. In the quagmire of negotiations the insurgents forgot their strength in calling for the resignation of the nationalist government of Karadzic. At the same moment they allowed back in through the side window what they had kicked out of the front door: they called for... the anticipated general elections. Until then they had relied on their own weapons - strikes, defeatism - in order to impose the improvement of their conditions of life, then they gave way and submitted to the electoral circus.

Profiting from these weaknesses, the State succeeded, after an initial period of impotence, in returning the movement to a strict framework of negotiation in order to avoid being outflanked. The objective was to reduce it to a particular situation, to reabsorb it and empty it of all subversive content. For such and such a unit the question of soldiers' pay was to be played for in negotiations, for another it was the dismissal of certain "corrupt" officers or politicians, etc.... It was the beginning of the end. The mutineers no longer even dared to affirm their superiority in the face of the almighty State. None of the various negotiators of high rank who successively came to parley with them were taken hostage, something which would have clearly expressed the seriousness of their demands. No, once under way, the negotiations developed according to the classic schema of pacifism and conciliation.

Parliamentarism and negotiations became the real terrain on which the whole force of the bourgeoisie could be successfully imposed. The movement was prolonged for more than a week. But on both sides there was the status quo. After having tried in turn, threats, flattery and appeals to patriotism, the bourgeoisie were quite obviously banking on a deterioration of the movement. The time and lack of perspective of proletarians had strengthened the bourgeoisie.

They tried to play for time and to "justify" the demands, but not the methods, of the mutineers. In taking on board some of their demands the bourgeoisie tried to fix the movement while letting it decline. They thus hoped to put off proletarians by isolating the most combative, by accusing them of being "traitors". They appealed to them to go back to barracks, all the while waving the flag of "the fatherland in danger". Stigmatising the revolt as "helping our enemies" they made a vigorous appeal to the patriotism of the mutineers as the fighting redoubled its violence in Krajina.

In line with parliamentary logic the mutineers had scaled down their demand for "energetic measures against war profiteers". And who was this addressed to and demanded of!? To the State, to those who are the most important representatives of the class which LIVES off war: the bourgeoisie. Despite the fact that they affirmed that the existing MPs "are not fit for their jobs" which they abuse "to enrich themselves" their "black list" never included those that they negotiated with! This was another of these proletarians' contradictions.

Once destabilised and worn out the mutiny gave up its arms and fell under the two-pronged assault of promises and repression. The state awarded to the mutineers, who had repudiated their struggle, 10 days leave and a promise to satisfy their social demands, while a selective repression struck the principal leaders of the mutiny. The arrests were the final response of our enemies.

The continuation of capitalist butchery and the return to the diplomatic game (the negotiations in Geneva) could only be imposed when the proletariat was beaten!!! "For a new Geneva, calm must reign in Banja Luka!" The bourgeoisie have always known the art of running war like they run peace in their best interests - to pacify us, to lead us docilely to the killing fields, to the factory!!! Benefitting from all the weaknesses of the mutiny, from its lack of extension, from the democratic poison which corrupted it, the State crushed it to temporarily restore social peace and relaunch the war on the battle fields.

Despite the pitiless critique that we must direct against the weaknesses and expressed limits of this mutiny, communist militants shed light on such acts that show us that defeatist minorities are alive and well. Such actions express the point of view of the whole of our class. Tomorrow revolutionary defeatist mutinies will make the qualitative leap which involves the liaison and organisation of the struggle against the war WITH THEIR CLASS

BROTHERS AND SISTERS on the other side of the vile frontiers imposed on us by Capital.

But already today the resistance of proletarians in Banja Luka proves to us that the proletariat is never completely ready to be massacred in some new capitalist butchery without turning a hair. Nor to accept sacrifices, austerity, misery, death...

Class solidarity with the revolutionary defeatists of all camps! Lets turn our guns against our generals, against our own bourgeoisie!

Note

1. Other collective movements of defeatism were also produced this year on other fronts, like, for example, in Azerbaijan where, to counter the wave of desertions which undermined the army on the front of Nagorny-Karabak, the bourgeoisie ordered the suspension of all leave and the enrolment of all young men between 18 and 25 into the national army starting from April '93. Sanctions against deserters have also been reinforced, thus confirming the defeatism which sweeps through the Azeri troops.